

PRESS RELEASE

Brussels, 21 March 2011

ASTURIAS PLEDGE

WHO prioritises environmental and occupational cancer risks

"Decreasing, and eventually eliminating the exposure to environmental and occupational carcinogens is the most effective way to prevent a number of cancers," according to the World Health Organization in a press release following a meeting in Asturias, Spain, 17-18 March 2011. (1)

WHO has put environmental and occupational factors in first place in the primary prevention of cancer as the outcome of this meeting (2) and the launch of the Asturias Pledge. (3)

"Many environmental and occupational factors, including certain chemicals, radiation and airborne particles, can cause cancer," said Dr Maria Neira, Director for Public Health and Environment at WHO. "These cancers could be prevented and reduced by changes in national and international policy to limit people's involuntary exposure to these substances."

Immediately prior to the meeting, Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) issued a briefing on the role of environmental pollution in cancer causation. It also highlights the policy opportunities for reducing exposure. (4)

Lisette van Vliet, Toxics Policy Advisor, Health and Environment Alliance, who took part in the meeting, said:

"The Pledge represents an important milestone in developing international consensus on the primary prevention of cancer - that is, stopping cancer before it starts by eliminating harmful exposures. This recognition by medical and scientific experts and the WHO makes our call for specific EU and national targets - to reduce people's exposure to cancer-related chemicals by half by 2020 - even more urgent."

HEAL is currently running a campaign to raise awareness of the links between cancer and the environment. It also aims to ensure that these links are fully recognised within the European Union's chemicals laws and policies, such as REACH, pesticide and biocide legislation. (5)

One of the campaign activities will be to help ensure that the Pledge receives a high profile at the UN General Assembly meeting on chronic disease planned for September 2011 (6).

The Pledge calls on civil society networks to raise awareness about practices and processes that increase the risks of cancer. WHO would like to see groups, such as HEAL and its members, "raise awareness, educate and advocate for funding to implement effective primary prevention of environmental and occupational related cancers". (1)

The meeting brought together more than 50 experts and journalists. Representatives from HEAL member and partner organisations included André Cicoella, Réseau Santé Environnement and Advisor to INERIS (French institute of environmental risks); Dominique Belpomme, ARTAC/ISDE France; Clare Dimmer, Breast Cancer UK; Moira Adams, Women's Environmental Network, Scotland; and Helen Lynn, Alliance for Cancer Prevention, UK; and Morag Parnell, Women's Environmental Network, Scotland. Other participants included Annie Sasco, INSERM (French institute of health research) and Phil Landrigan, Mount Sinai School of Medicine, USA.

Notes

1. WHO press release, The Asturias Pledge - A new call to action on environmental and occupational cancer prevention, 18 March 2011, http://www.who.int/phe/news/events/international_conference/PR_cancer_conf2011_en.pdf
2. WHO International Conference website
http://www.who.int/phe/news/events/international_conference/en/index.html
3. Asturias Pledge is not yet finalised. See also pre-conference Asturias Pledge at http://www.who.int/phe/news/events/international_conference/Call_for_action_en.pdf



4. HEAL Briefing, Primary prevention of cancer: Reducing cancer through environmental policy change, March 2011, http://www.env-health.org/IMG/pdf/20110315_HEAL_Briefing_on_environmental_cancer_prevention_FINAL.pdf
5. HEAL Cancer and Environment Week, November 2010, see <http://www.env-health.org/a/3605>
6. UN Summit on non-communicable diseases, September 2011, press conference announcement at http://www.un.org/News/briefings/docs/2010/100513_Diseases.doc.htm

Contact:

Dr Lisette Van Vliet, Toxics Policy Advisor, Health and Environment Alliance, Tel. +32 2 234 3645, Mobile: +32 484 614 528 Email: lisette@env-health.org

Diana Smith, Communications, Health and Environment Alliance, E-mail: Diana@env-health.org Tel: +33 1 55 25 25 84

The Health and Environment Alliance aims to raise awareness of how environmental protection improves health. It achieves this by creating opportunities for better representation of citizens' and health experts' perspectives in the environment and health-related European policy-making. Our membership includes a diverse network of more than 65 citizens', patients', women's, health professionals' and environmental organisations across Europe and has a strong track record in increasing public and expert engagement in both EU debates and the decision-making process.

Chemicals Health Monitor (www.chemicalshealthmonitor.org) is an initiative of the Health and Environment Alliance (www.env-health.org).